

## UNEXPECTED HUMOR IN CHURCH

Dad was a good preacher. He prepared carefully, knowing he would need to rely on just a few one-sentence headings on a sheet of paper, once in the pulpit, because of his limited eyesight. His style was eloquent and formal, and the effect was often dramatic. In the beginning days of his career, he took voice lessons for the express purpose of improving his speaking voice which had an authoritative resounding quality.

But as we learned one Sunday in the Glen Ellyn church when he preached a particularly impelling sermon, he was also unaware of the effect of his splendid oratory on his congregants!

On this occasion, his text was Ephesians 5:14, a verse that he paraphrased in a dramatic refrain that he repeated with resounding force in his well-modulated baritone voice, repeating it from time to time throughout the sermon for effect:

*Wake, wake ye sleepyhead!  
Rise and walk in newness of life.*

In the congregation was a middle-aged man named Joe who worked hard at a physically active job all week, and who found it easy to fall asleep once he settled into place in church on Sundays. Occasionally his wife would give him a poke, when his slumber became too evident by his snoring. On this particular Sunday, Joe had slumped down into his usual sleeping position. As the sermon progressed, with the iteration of the refrain "Wake, wake, ye sleepyhead," some of us in the rows behind him could sense his wife's growing apprehension as Joe drifted into deeper and deeper slumber.

My father was totally unaware of the situation his sermon was creating, and his voice crescendoed toward a climax at the end of the sermon. As his voice fairly thundered,

*Wake, wake, ye sleepyhead!*

suddenly Joe jerked upright, apparently hearing for the first time Dad's refrain as a command given personally to him. He blinked, and as the refrain continued,

*Rise. . .*

Joe stumbled dazedly to his feet, staring straight ahead. The rest of us, his wife included, held our breaths, for we were already into the completion of the refrain in our minds,

. . . *and walk in newness of life.*

Joe rose, turned and walked into the aisle, and out the back door of the church.

Than noon, during dinner, we asked Dad if he realized what had occurred during his sermon. "Oh," he said, "maybe that explains why Joe's wife shook my hand so warmly at the door and thanked me so profusely for the sermon!"

**Afterword:**

There were other memorable sermons. As a child, I loved the special occasions when he replaced the usual sermon with a story of his own creation. Although geared for the children in the congregation, the adults always listened more closely at such times as well. As an adolescent, I responded with particular appreciation to my father's love of beauty and sensitivity to nature, often expressed in his sermons. One night, as our family walked to church, we witnessed a beautiful sunset. Dad's opening remarks that evening in his sermon impressed me so deeply that I wrote it down.

*God preached a sermon tonight.*

*He didn't say a word.*

*He just drew his finger across the sky,*

*And left a trail of glory there.*

*I wish I could [preach like that.*